

# Wires

## Web

not very useful, except when it was right information on the way to airer things Verizon advertises—weather reports—were less crucial and more short, it's not quite worth the \$6.95, access after a three-month trial. It's offering—there's a lot of Web (much of an interface to get to it. It takes 10 seconds, and sometimes in just 10 seconds, and sometimes in just 10 seconds, if tolerable, pause between For browsing controls, the phone has a "Back" button (though the "Back" button it would have been useful).

because the phone had to re-establish

tested, any kind of non-numeric data is particularly difficult, since the numbers are all small—you're usually typing three words per line.

features and services included on the particular, the ability to fetch e-mail from any Internet-standard account. Others are not—the entertainment content is second-rate fare like lottery numbers and daily horoscopes. And still others have their utility undercut by bad data. "Verizon Finders," for instance, locates nearby restaurants, hotels, theaters, gas stations and car repair shops, but seems to be missing information: A search for local Caribbean restaurants missed my two favorites, including one only four blocks away from my house.

The coolest element in the package is the way Verizon lets you set up your account on a regular computer at its myvzw.com Web site. You can select features you like and winnow your preferred news categories, stocks to watch and phone numbers, then have them beamed to the phone. But you can't prune bookmarks for Verizon's own content partners or edit the clunky, nested bookmark structure preconfigured on the phone. And while you can add new numbers to the

## How to Pick A Cell-Phone Service

**Q** Okay, so what differentiates these six companies' offerings?

**A** Each has particular advantages and quirks. If you travel all the time, including in rural areas, look at the no-roaming, no-long-distance plans from AT&T, Cellular One and Verizon. If your travel is mostly from city to city, investigate Nextel, too. If, on the other hand, you mostly roam up and down the Northeast Corridor, Sprint, Verizon and VoiceStream's East Coast calling plans are worth a look. (VoiceStream covers a little more ground, including all of Pennsylvania and Ohio, in its calling area.)

If, on the other hand, you think you'll mostly call around town, Cellular One offers the most price plans (but note our reviewer's experiences with its coverage). Verizon has good area coverage, but its local plans also include the highest roaming rates in the business. If you're just looking for an occasional-use plan, skip Nextel, whose services are geared toward frequent callers.

Don't forget to check each company's digital coverage map to see if it covers—or claims to cover—your home, office and other regular haunts.

**Are these companies all there is? I've seen ads for other wireless providers.**

These other companies—MCI WorldCom being by far the biggest—are cellular resellers. They neither own nor operate their own network, instead leasing out other providers' equipment and services.

**What's the deal with the different "air interface" digital technologies, like CDMA, TDMA and GSM?**

Not much, if you're not a telecom engineer.

Sprint and Verizon employ CDMA (Code Division Multiple Access), in which each call is tagged with its own digital code—sort of how two people speaking a foreign language can hear each other across a crowded room. CDMA is the leading system in the United States; all other things being equal (they never are!), it offers the most calling capacity. AT&T and Cellular One use something called TDMA, short for Time Division Multiple Access, in which multiple calls are squeezed into the same chunk of frequency by assigning each one its own fraction-of-a-second repeating time slot. VoiceStream uses GSM (Global System for Mobile communications); based on time-division principles as well, it's the oldest and most popular technology worldwide. GSM's standout feature here is the subscriber identity module (SIM) card, which can be swapped in and out of different phones to transfer a phone number and account information. Nextel, in turn, uses a different technology called iDEN (Integrated Digital Enhanced Network), which also uses time slots to carve up the spectrum but supports data and two-way dispatch radio along with regular phone calls, and runs on a different set of frequencies.

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